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ABSTRACT

Since Erikson first explained identity synthesis for women as a single unitary pattern, identity synthesis for women leading different life styles has been shown to form separate and distinct patterns. These findings suggest that men's identity synthesis may also be more complex than a unitary process. Similarities and differences in identity synthesis between men and women with different life styles were explored. Professional men and women (N=53) completed the Sense of Identity Inventory which measured strength of identity for personal and career stages. Subjects also completed the Satisfaction Scale and, by their responses, were categorized as career- or family-oriented. Strength of identity scores indicated that women's identity was weaker than men's in earlier, but not later, career stages. The first married stage brought the greatest increment in strength of identity for males; for females, the first child stage had the same effect. Identity for career males increased in strength only at first promotion and first married stages. Strength of identity for family males and career and family females increased in progressive life cycle stages. Career males' identity focus was always personal. Identity focus for all other groups was a balance of personal and reflected dimensions. The findings suggest that identity synthesis is related to primary sources of satisfaction and to the concomitant life style as well as to gender. (Author/NRB)

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CAREER AND PERSONAL IDENTITY SYNTHESIS IN PROFESSIONAL MEN AND WOMEN

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Career and Personal Identity Synthesis in Professional Men and Women

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In 1965 Erikson detailed his theory on identity synthesis for women as a single unitary pattern. More recent research (O'Connell, 1976) indicates that identity synthesis for women leading different life styes (Traditional, Neotraditional, or Nontraditional) form three separate and distinct patterns, not one as Erikson (1965) suggests.

These findings on women's identity patterns suggest that men's identity synthesis is more complex than presently believed. Bailyn (1970) has identified men's life styles as career- or family-oriented depending upon their major source of satisfaction. As women are increasingly choosing nontraditional life styles for themselves, i.e., simultaneously integrating a career with marriage and childrearing, the question arises as to whether or not their identity patterns are becoming similar to men's and if so, on what dimensions.

The purposes of the present study are: (1) to determine the correctness of Erikson's (1959, 1963) formulation for identity synthesis as a unitary process for men regardless of life style; and (2) to determine the similarities and differences in identity synthesis between men and nontraditional women leading similar life styles.

It is generally hypothesized that: (1) four separate identity patterns will be delineated (Career Males, Family Males, Career Females, Family Females) and more specifically hypothesized that (2) strength of identity scores will increase from first career job to first promotion and from first promotion to last promotion stages for all groups; (3) the first married stage will contribute significantly to strength of identity for all groups; but (4) strength of identity scores will be higher at the school children stage than at the preschool children stage for Career and Family-oriented Females but not for males; and (5) focus of identity for Family Males and Females will be more reflected (based on significant others) than focus of identity for Career Males and Females.

METHOD

Subjects

Subjects were 53 men and women with doctoral degrees between the ages of 32 and 63 years (mean age = 45.2 years). All subjects were employed in academe, were married and had children. Various age groups and religious preferences were represented in each life style group.

Procedure

Subjects anonymously completed the Satisfaction Scale (Bailyn, 1970). Subjects' responses to this scale were used to categorize them as career or family-oriented; Career Males (N = 7) and Females (N = 13) ranked career as their primary source of satisfaction; Family Males (N = 15) and Females (N = 18) ranked family as their primary source of satisfaction. Subjects also completed the Sense of Identity Inventory (O'Connell, 1976) which measured strength of identity for personal (late adolescence, first married, first child, preschool children, and school children) and career (first important career job, first promotion, current career job, last promotion) stages on 9-point Likert-type scales (9 = strong, 1 = weak). The Inventory also measured focus of identity for personal and career stages in open-ended items. These items were scored according to the procedure described in O'Connell (1976). Briefly, responses are coded into one of eight categories depending upon the combination of single or double focus identity, positive or negative identity, personal (based on own attributes) or reflected (based on significant others) identity described. Scorer agreement between the author and another rater on these items was very high as was rescore reliability.

RESULTS

The data on strength of identity were analyzed using repeated measures ANOVAs for career stages and for personal stages. In addition, t-tests were used to determine differences between stages for each group. The data on focus of identity were converted into percentages.

An overall repeated measures ANOVA indicates a significant increase in strength of identity over career stages for all groups ($F(3,151) = 19.963$, $p < .001$) and a significant sex times career stages interaction ($F(3,151) = 3.687$, $p < .05$). Career and Family Males report a stronger sense of identity during the first career job and first promotion stages in comparison to females while Career and Family Females report a stronger sense of identity in comparison to males during current career and last promotion stages. (See Table 1 for identity means for career stages.) Separate repeated ANOVAs reveal that significant differences in strength of identity scores emerge during progressive career stages for Family Males ($F(3,51) = 5.185$, $p < .01$), Career Females ($F(3,31) = 7.443$, $p < .01$), and Family Females ($F(3,39) = 17.175$, $p < .001$) but not for Career Males ($F(3,27) = .618$, $p > .500$).

Table 2 indicates the significant t-test comparisons of identity between various career stages. Career Males enjoy an increase in strength of identity scores between the first career job and first promotion stages but no other significant increases at other stages. Career Females enjoy a significant increase between the first career job and current career job stages, between first career job and last promotion stages, and between first promotion and last promotion stages. Family Males enjoy a significant increase in identity scores between first career job and current career job and between first career job and last promotion as well as between last promotion and first promotion stages. Family Females enjoy a significant increase in strength of identity scores between first career job and first promotion stages, first career job and current career job stages, first career job and last promotion stages, first promotion and current career job stages, and first promotion and last promotion stages.

An overall repeated measures ANOVA (F (4,214) = 16.250, $p < .001$) indicates that significant differences in scores for strength of identity for personal stages emerge during the life cycle. Separate repeated measures ANOVAs indicate that Family Males (F (4,64) = 15.928, $p < .001$), Family Females (F (4,64) = 5.602, $p < .001$), and Career Females (F (4,54) = 3.578, $p < .05$) but not Career Males (F (4,29) = 1.709, $p > .188$) enjoy a significant increase in strength of identity throughout the personal stages of the life cycle. (See Table 3 for identity means for personal stages.)

Table 4 indicates the significant t-test comparisons for identity between various personal stages. Career Males enjoy a significant increase in strength of identity scores at the first married stage in comparison to the adolescent stage but in no other comparisons. Career Females enjoy a significant increase in strength of identity scores between late adolescence and first child and late adolescence and school children stages, between the first married and first child stages, and between the preschool children and school children stages. Family Males enjoy a significant increase in strength of sense of identity scores between the late adolescence and the first married, first child, preschool children, and school children stages, also between the first married and preschool children and first married and school children stages. Family Females enjoy a significant increase in strength of identity scores between the late adolescence and the first married, first child, preschool children and school children stages; also between the first married and first child, preschool children and school children stages, and between the preschool children and school children stages.

Table 5 indicates the percentages for focus of identity for career stages on open-ended items. Examination of this table indicates that although the magnitude differs, a substantial percentage of subjects leading various life styles report a positive personal sense of identity during each career stage.

Table 6 indicates the percentages for focus of identity for personal stages on open-ended items. Career Males describe a single focus, positive personal, identity at all stages yet it is noteworthy that 42% of Career Males describe a double focus, positive personal and reflected, identity during the first child stage. For Career Females, the late adolescence, first child, and school children stages are characterized by a double focus, positive personal and reflected, sense of identity (50%, 63%, and 60%, respectively). A substantial 30%, however, describe their identity in positive personal terms during late adolescence. During the first married stage, 56% of Career Females describe a single focus, positive personal, identity. During the preschool children stage, 50% describe a single focus, positive reflected, identity.

Family Males describe a single focus, positive personal, identity in late adolescence (60%) but a double focus, positive personal and reflected, identity during the first married, first child, and preschool children stages (60%, 73%, 46%, respectively). During the preschool children stage an additional 38% describe a single focus, positive personal, identity. By the school children stage, 50% of Family Males describe a double focus, positive personal and reflected, identity and 50% describe a single focus, positive and personal, identity. Family Females are the only group in which 50% describe a double focus, positive personal and negative reflected, identity during adolescence. For all other stages Family Females describe a double focus, positive personal and reflected identity: first married, 67%; first child, 71%; preschool children, 63%; school children, 86%.

DISCUSSION

This study seems to indicate that identity synthesis is related to primary sources of satisfaction (career or family) and to the concomitant life style as well as to sex (male or female). The data seem to indicate that Erikson's formulations (1959, 1963, 1965) for identity synthesis for men and women are incomplete. In support of Erikson, the first married stage does contribute to strength of identity scores for Career and Family Males and for Family Females (but not for Career Females). Contrary to Erikson, the data indicate that there are at least four separate identity patterns for Career and Family Males and Career and Family Females not just two--a male pattern and a female pattern.

For career and personal stages of identity, Career Males adhere most closely to the Eriksonian pattern. Identity increases in strength at the first promotion and first married stages but not significantly thereafter. Identity focus for Career Males is positive personal at all career and personal stages.

In comparison to earlier stages, Family Males enjoy significant increases in sense of identity in progressive career and personal stages. Like Career Males, the focus of identity for Family Males for all career stages is positive personal. Unlike Career Males, the focus of identity for Family Males for the first married through school children stages is positive personal and reflected. For these stages, Family Males describe a sense of self that focuses not only on their personal attributes but also on their roles as husbands and fathers.

Career and Family Females also enjoy significant increases in strength of identity in progressive career and personal stages. For Career and Family Females, the first child stage brings the greatest increment in strength of identity. Perhaps for this highly achievement-oriented female population having a child is a "remarkable production" and exceeds the event of "getting married." For Career and Family Females, the school children stage is of particular significance in comparison to the preschool children stage and represents the highest ratings for strength of identity.

Family Females, like Family Males, describe a positive personal and reflected sense of identity once marriage and childrearing occur. Unlike Family Males (50%), Family Females (86%) are strongly committed to this double focus at the school children stage. For both these groups, identity focus at these stages is a balance between sense of self and relationships to others.

Focus of identity for Career Females alternates between a double and single focus throughout the personal stages. Like Career Males, Career Females describe a single focus, positive personal identity during the first married stage but unlike all other groups they describe a single focus, positive reflected, identity during the preschool children stage. For all other stages, identity focus for Career Females is a balance between a sense of self and relationships with others.

Strength of identity for the career stages for Career and Family Females seems to be considerably different from strength of identity for

males despite the fact that the focus of identity for all groups is positive personal. The sex times career stages interaction indicates that females have a weaker sense of identity in the early career stages but by mid-life have a sense of identity that is as strong as that of males. These data suggest that it is more difficult for females to form a strong identity during early career stages. Females are more likely to experience more early conflict and less certainty about roles. However, once females are well into their careers and promotions the fact that they have survived, achieved, and been acknowledged serves to strengthen their sense of self and the sense of career identity.

The present study delineates differences and commonalities in the identity patterns for Career and Family Males and Females and brings us one step closer to understanding the patterns of identity synthesis.

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Table 1

Identity Scale Means for Career and Family Males and Females for Career Stages

Stages	Career		Family	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
First Career Job	6.57	6.00	6.77	5.40
First Promotion	7.43	6.25	7.39	6.30
Current Career Job	7.71	8.25	8.08	8.40
Last Promotion	7.57	7.75	8.15	8.30

Table 2

Levels of Significance in T-Test Comparisons of Identity for Career Stages

Stages	First Promotion				Current Career Job				Last Promotion			
	CM	CF	FM	FF	CM	CF	FM	FF	CM	CF	FM	FF
First Career Job	.05	NS	NS	.05	NS	.01	.05	.01	NS	.05	.01	.01
First Promotion	--	--	--	--	NS	.01	NS	.01	NS	.05	.05	.01
Current Career Job	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	NS	NS	NS	NS

CM = Career Males; CF = Career Females; FM = Family Males; FF = Family Females.

Table 3

Identity Scale Means for Career and Family Males and Females for Personal Stages

Stages	Career		Family	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Late Adolescence	5.50	4.82	5.46	5.08
First Married	6.83	5.27	6.85	5.69
First Child	6.83	6.36	7.08	6.69
Preschool Children	7.17	6.09	7.39	6.69
School Children	7.33	6.82	7.69	7.39

Table 4

Levels of Significance in T-Test Comparisons of Identity for Personal Stages

Stages	First Married				First Child				Preschool Children				School Children			
	CM	CF	FM	FF	CM	CF	FM	FF	CM	CF	FM	FF	CM	CF	FM	FF
Late Adolescence	.05	NS	.001	.05	NS	.01	.001	.01	NS	NS	.01	.05	NS	.05	.001	.01
First Married	--	--	--	--	NS	.05	NS	.05	NS	NS	.05	.05	NS	NS	.05	.01
First Child	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Preschool Children	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	NS	.05	NS	.05

CM = Career Males; CF = Career Females; FM = Family Males; FF = Family Females.

Table 5

Percentages for Career and Family Males and Females for Career Stages on Open-Ended Identity Items

	Career				Family			
	Males		Females		Males		Females	
	R/P	P	R/P	P	R/P	P	R/P	P
First Career Job*	14	86	--	90	36	64	27	60
First Promotion*	14	86	33	56	36	64	25	75
Current Career Job*	20	60	22	67	42	58	35	59
Last Promotion*	--	100	40	40	20	80	27	73

*Responses in other categories not reported. Percentages rounded to next whole number.
R/P = Positive Personal and Reflected Identity.
P = Positive Personal Identity

Table 6

Percentages for Career and Family Males and Females for Personal Stages on Open-Ended Identity Items

	Career				Family			
	Males		Females		Males		Females	
	R/P	P	R/P	P	R/P	P	R/P	P
Late Adolescence*	14	57	50	30	14	60	11	17***
First Married*	28	71	33	56	60	33	67	11
First Child*	42	57	63	13	73	27	71	6
Preschool Children*	28	71		17**	46	38	63	13
School Children*	17	50	60	20	50	50	86	14

*Responses in other categories not reported. Percentages rounded to next whole number.
**Career Females (50%) describe their sense of identity in the Preschool Children Stage as positive reflected.
***Family Females (50%) describe their sense of identity in the Late Adolescence stage as positive personal, negative reflected.
R/P = Positive Personal and Reflected Identity.
P = Positive Personal Identity.